

Pahoa's fire help

Gov. Lingle signs order transferring land for future station

By CHRIS LOOS
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Governor Linda Lingle announced Tuesday that she signed an executive order transferring 19.4 acres of state land in Pahoa to Hawaii County for a new fire station and other future government uses.

"It's no cost to us," said county Managing Director Dixie Kaetsu. She said the state will still own the land but it will be under county control.

County officials hope to start with a new fire station and later build a new Pahoa police substation and possibly some recreation facilities, including a gymnasium.

The fire and police stations would replace outdated ones in the heart of Pahoa town.

Harry Yada, the district land agent representing the Big Island for the state Department of Land and Natural Resources, said the Land Board approved Mayor Harry Kim's request for the land transfer at a June 18 meeting in Honolulu.

The property is on the makai side of Highway 130 north of Kahakai Boulevard just before the entrance to Pahoa town. It was previously leased as an anthurium farm, Yada said.

According to Kaetsu, the county already has \$150,000 in federal money for planning and design of the fire station, and considers that the top priority for the complex. She hopes that once the design is complete, the county will have funds for construction.

"We are actively looking for the money now," Kaetsu said. "The (existing) Pahoa fire station is the pits."

Fire Chief Darryl Oliveira said the Pahoa station is not built to withstand hurricane-force winds. Besides that, he said, it was constructed in 1969 to house one firefighter and one small fire truck. It's been renovated, but is still too small. One tanker truck is rusting because it has to be parked outside, he said.

Oliveira said the station's location requires firefighters to drive the fire engines directly into traffic. "It also smack-dab right in the middle of town but yet it's tucked off on a side road where it's not highly visible to motorists and passers to the community," he said.

Councilman Gary Safarik, who represents the district that includes Pahoa, said moving the fire and police stations out of the center of town will allow easier access by the public and shorten emergency response times.

Lingle's office said in a news release Tuesday that it's important for the state and counties to work together to accommodate growth. "Setting aside this land for public use will enable the county to continue to improve the Puna community," she said.

Kim, in the news release, said the site can accommodate future expansion. "This land will also give the opportunity to locate needed recreational facilities near other county facilities in order to provide both safety and convenience of the people of lower Puna," he said.



The aging Pahoa Fire Station, located on Kau Hale Street, was originally built in 1969 to accommodate one firefighter and one small truck. Gov. Linda Lingle announced Tuesday the transfer of 19.4 acres of state land in Pahoa to Hawaii County for a new fire station and other future government uses. WILLIAM ING/Tribune Herald

The new site will act as a gateway to Pahoia, Oliveira said.

"It's great that the mayor supported it," he said. "I think it's going to be a big plus to the community."

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